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## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# The Issue of Energy in Central Asia and the Role of Turkmenistan

Central Asian countries have notable reserves in the world in terms of energy resources. For example, according to the report on Central Asia published by the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2022, the total amount of oil in the region is 31.2 billion barrels and the amount of natural gas is 23.4 trillion cubic meters.[1] The oil and natural gas resources of Central Asia increase the geo-

political, geoeconomic, and geostrategic value of the region. Because of this reason, interest in the region increased after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Today, the region continues to be an attractive area for regional and global powers.

Crises such as the Arab Spring, the Syrian Civil War, and the Russia-Ukraine War, witnessed by



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the world in the 21st century, have brought the issue of “energy security” to the agenda in terms of regional and global powers. The rising in instability in the Middle East and the influence that the United States of America (USA) is trying to establish over energy countries have made energy security more important for various countries, especially China. In this regard, energy security constitutes one of the important issues of international relations.

The recent Western sanctions against Russia have brought some consequences. According to the agreement reached between the European Union (EU) and the G7 in December 2022, an agreement was reached on a ceiling price on global imports of Russian oil.[2] This decision has two essential consequences. First, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decision banning oil sales to countries that will implement the EU's decision. Another is that Russia, Europe's largest natural gas supplier, and the world's second-largest oil exporter, turned to India and China to sell energy at a cheaper rate.

All these developments paved the way for the formation of a competitive environment in energy. In other words, the EU has turned to various alternatives. Central Asian countries have also been remarkable centers at this point and strengthened their relations with other countries. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan rank first in terms of reserves such as oil, natural gas, and coal in Central Asian countries. Looking at the distribution of world natural gas reserves by country, it is seen that Turkmenistan ranks fourth after Russia, Iran, and Qatar, respectively.[3]

While Turkmenistan exports natural gas to Central Asian countries, China and Iran; it is also closely interested in the EU market. In January 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping said that he wanted to cooperate more with Turkmenistan in the field of energy.[4] Turkmenistan is the single largest natural gas supplier to China. In this case, it can be said that Turkmenistan has a significant place for China in the energy supply.

On the other hand, the Russia-Ukraine War caused the energy crisis to come to the fore in the EU countries, and while the union was looking for a solution to the energy crisis; it oriented to Central Asia. In addition, the new customer potential has been an important development for the Central Asian countries that have taken steps in economic development. However, time is needed to transport energy between Turkmenistan and Europe. Naturally, Turkmenistan continues to export energy to the regional states and China instead of the potential market opportunity in Europe.

As a result, it is seen that the balances in the energy field have changed with the Russia-Ukraine War. Central Asian countries are also important producers at this point. However, the infrastructures of the countries require to be renewed. In this process, where energy security is discussed more, some projects based in Central Asia are on the agenda. This is because the process has increased the importance of Central Asia to the West. At this point, it can be stated that the prominent actor is Turkmenistan.

[1] Ivo Walinga-Farkhod Aminjonov, “Advancing Energy Security in Central Asia”, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/8/513787\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/8/513787_0.pdf), (Date of Accession: 27.01.2023), s. 6.

[2] “Explained: How G7 Country's Price Ceiling on Russian Crude will Impact Russia”, Explainers <https://www.indiatimes.com/explainers/news/explained-how-g7-countrys-price-ceiling-on-russian-crude-will-impact-russia-587470.html>, (Date of Accession: 26.01.2023).

[3] “Leading Countries by Proved Natural Gas Reserves Worldwide in 2010 and 2020”, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/265329/countries-with-the-largest-natural-gas-reserves/>, (Date of Accession: 27.01.2023).

[4] “China's Xi Calls for Greater Cooperation with Turkmenistan on Natural Gas”, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinas-xi-calls-greater-cooperation-with-turkmenistan-natural-gas-2023-01-06/>, (Date of Accession: 27.01.2023).





## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Seeking Strong Cooperation in France–Greece Relations

In recent years, France has been the country with which Greece has cooperated the most in the field of defense among European countries. In this case, the fact that Paris wanted to realize its ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean through the Athens administration played a decisive role. In this context, the joint actions of the two countries in the Eastern Mediterranean have led to the establishment of a special relationship between the parties. In this sense, the basis of the partnership between the two countries is cooperation in the field of defense.

As a matter of fact, French Defense Minister Sebastien Lecornu paid a visit to Athens on Febru-

ary 23, 2023. During the visit, Lecornu met with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis. The focus of the meeting was on the construction of the Belharra frigate in Greece and the Strategic Defence Agreement signed between Greece and France in 2021.[1]

However, in February 2022, the Greek Parliament authorized the Government of Mitsotakis to purchase Belharra-class frigates worth 3 billion euros from France. The agreement signed between Athens and Paris includes the purchase of three frigates and six Rafale fighter jets, totaling more than 4.4 billion euros. These frigates are expected to be delivered to Greece in 2026.[2]



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Therefore, the meeting between the parties symbolizes the confirmation of the partnership between the two countries in the field of defense. France exports significant arms to Greece. This makes the Paris administration's approach to Athens even more special. In recent years, Greece has been an important customer of France's arms market. Greece has purchased frigate warships from France as well as Rafale fighter jets. Greece's preference for Rafale fighter jets can be interpreted as a complete lack of trust in the United States (US) or that it is trying to secure itself more.

In addition to purchasing frigates from France, Greece also ordered corvettes from Italy. In this context, it can be said that the "defense" dimension predominates in Athens' relations with Paris and Rome. In other words, it can be stated that Greece does not want to remain dependent on a single actor at the point of armament. Moreover, Greece is trying to integrate Paris into its security policy by purchasing fighter jets from France.

On the other hand, France stands out as the most important country in the defense field of the bloc within the EU. Emmanuel Macron, who became the President of France in 2017, advocates the creation of a European Army in order to defend the EU against actors such as Russia, China and the US.[3] In this context, Germany stands out with its economic power in the EU, while France is the key actor in the field of defense. Therefore, for Greece, developing cooperation with the EU's most important country in the field of defence does not only mean the development of bilateral relations. In other words, it can be interpreted that the relations on the France–Greece line have deepened through cooperation in the field of defense and that this has an EU dimension.

Furthermore, the defense agreement signed between France and Greece in 2021 was described as the first step in Europe's achievement of strategic autonomy. Because the agreement between the two countries provides for mutual assistance in case one of the parties is attacked by a third country, even if it is a member of NATO.[4] In this respect, it can be argued that France sees Greece as an important partner in the context of the European Army. In addition, it can be said that France's aim is to prevent Washington's relations with Athens, which it considers to be damaging Europe's strategic autonomy by drawing Greece to its side.

Behind Macron's overt support for Greece by ignoring the geopolitical realities in the Eastern Mediterranean, the French President's desire to position himself as a key actor in the sovereignty of Europe plays a decisive role.

On the other hand, another factor that is effective in the development of the partnership between the two countries is the cooperation in the field of energy. In this context, the recently increased cooperation on the Athens–Paris line can be explained by France's economic and energy interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, it can be considered that France wants to use Greece as a proxy actor to realize its own ambitions in the region.

Consequently, through increased defence cooperation between Athens and Paris, France has become one of the countries that Greece relies most on when shaping its own security policy. That is why a strategic cooperation between the parties has developed in recent years. It can be said that the relations between France and Greece will continue to deepen and the parties will maintain to take steps to increase cooperation in the field of defense. As a reflection of this, Greece will continue to buy weapons from France and accelerate its attempts to integrate Paris into its own defense policy.

[1] "Greece's Prime Minister Meets with Defence Minister of France", The Greek Herald, <https://greekherald.com.au/news/greeces-prime-minister-meets-with-defence-minister-of-france/>, (Date of Accession: 25.02.2023).

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Macron Calls for 'True European Army' to Defend Against Russia, US, China", Euractiv, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/macron-calls-for-european-army-to-defend-against-russia-us-china/>, (Date of Accession: 25.02.2023).

[4] "France and Greece Take First Step Towards EU Force in NATO", Euractiv, [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/france-and-greece-take-first-step-for-eu/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/france-and-greece-take-first-step-for-eu/), (Date of Accession: 25.02.2023).



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Why France is Failing in the Sahel Region?

On 25 January 2023, the Government of Burkina Faso requested that French military forces leave the country within a month. This decision is noteworthy in that it was taken after the withdrawal of French forces from the country at the request of the Government of Mali. Therefore,

it can be said that France is gradually being removed from the strategic areas in the Sahel region, where it has been operating since the beginning of Operation Serval in 2013. The important point here is that the countries where the French military forces are located are turning to the Russian private mil-



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itary company Wagner. In addition, it should be emphasized that security risks have increased in the region since 2013. It is known that the terrorist threat that started in Mali last year has spread to Burkina Faso and Niger. Guinea, Benin, Togo, and Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire) are also under threat.

Mainly France: It has carried out various operations in many countries such as Chad, Mali, and Rwanda on the grounds of aiding the fight against terrorism. However, only the Mantra and Epervier operations, which were carried out in Chad between 1983 and 1987, were successful. The success of the military operation in Chad is not due to the structural weaknesses of this country; there are second-order weaknesses.

As can be understood, French military forces are considered as a deterrent force and a balancing act. However, the fact that Operation Barkhane, launched in 2014, with the aim of keeping the activities of terrorist's low-intensity until the local armed forces became part of the government to be formed, indicates that some historical lessons have been ignored. As a matter of fact, few French military personnel could not gain the upper hand.

Many opportunities could not be taken advantage of in this process. Nevertheless, at the end of 2020, a relative victory was declared, and the cells of the terrorist organization Deash in the Sahara Desert were defeated. However, France has expanded its area of operations instead of concentrating on pinpoint operations in limited areas. This has increased the reaction against France.

Another mistake of the Paris administration is that it treats the fight against radical religious groups only on the basis of security. However, it is imperative to take into account sociological facts and examine local dynamics. Because the success of radical groups is related to the fact that they receive some local support.

On the other hand, the countries of the Sahel Region stand out as failed states. The strategies of governments that could not build security, economic and social policies that would increase the welfare level of society also played a role in France's failure. When this situation is evaluated together with the reaction against France, the reason for the calls of the governments that invite Paris to leave the region is better understood.





## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Blinken's Visit to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and India

United States of America (USA) Secretary of State Antony Blinken will visit Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and India between February 28 and March 3, 2023. Blinken, who will go to New Delhi on March 1, 2023, as part of the G20 Foreign Ministers meeting, will attend the Ministerial Meeting held in Astana within the framework of C5+1 and then go on to Tashkent. During his visit to

Astana, Blinken will reaffirm their commitment to the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Central Asian countries and will discuss bilateral cooperation options with other regional countries. It will also hold meetings with official and civil society officials to confirm the strong partnership with India.[1] At this point, these visits and meetings are of critical significance due to the improvements in the region.



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As it is known, various discussions have emerged that the influence of Russia in its immediate surroundings has been broken due to the war it wages in Ukraine. This situation encouraged various actors from Japan to India to turn to the region. In such an environment, it is not expected for the USA to stay away from the region. Furthermore, the multi-vector foreign policy followed by the states of the region allows for the strengthening of relations within the framework of mutual respect and gain. In this regard, it can be said that the USA is trying to make an impact in Central Asia with the said visit.

Central Asia has become one of the most talked about regions after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The administrative structure and multi-vector foreign policies of the regional states have been discussed over whether the USA can establish an alliance with a country from the region and obtain a military base. At this point, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have come to the fore. The economic capacity of Kazakhstan and the demographic and military capacity of Uzbekistan enable Washington to perceive both countries as the dominant actors in the region. As a matter of fact, considering that Astana and Tashkent are governments that complement each other and have established allied relations, it can be said that Blinken's visit is of great importance.

On the other hand, Moscow has been trying to go south lately. In particular, Russia's relations with Pakistan and India over energy and economy attract both states. The fact that Islamabad is turning to Moscow to solve its energy problem and New Delhi to provide cheaper energy worries Washington. It is seen that Russia, which would like to create a block and market in Asia, has made progress with the energy card. Therefore, it can be argued that the USA seeks to confirm a strong partnership. Because the Washington government does not want to experience a situation similar to Beijing's rapprochement with Moscow in the period after 1990, in the case of New Delhi, with which it agreed during the Cold War period.

Some recent developments have brought the relations of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan with India to the agenda. India is a growing power in Eurasia and Central Asian states would like to develop their relations with this country in a multidimensional framework. It is clear that the relations between the parties within the scope of political, economic, and security have developed in a multidimensional way and there is a common will regarding this.

While India was a South Asian state; Central Asia is a neighbor to the aforementioned geography. For this reason, there are common sensitivities between the parties over security and threat perception. For this reason, military exercises are held between the states both within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and in the dimension of bilateral relations.

In addition, efforts are made to strengthen the economic and geopolitical ties between states. In particular, although the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is quite risky, it is thought that it will add dynamism to the relations between Central Asia and India. In this context, the political, economic, and military power of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and India is capable of affecting the dynamics in the region. The deepening and expansion of relations will increase this effect.

It can be said that the USA supports the rapprochement between the parties. However, the fact that Russia and Iran are among the main actors of INSTC worries the Washington government. Because the USA is uncomfortable with the possibility of both states overcoming the sanctions and creating influence through this corridor. At this point, it is given that Blinken's visit, especially with India, will not allow the states that are subject to sanctions to breathe and open up space.

As a result, it is possible to evaluate Blinken's visit within the framework of Russia's regional policies, USA-Central Asia, Central Asia-India, and India-Russia relations. The Washington government supports established relations as long as they do not harm their own interests and do not give room for their regional rivals/enemies. However, the evolution of these relations into a different process will disturb the United States. As a matter of fact, just as Russia's influence weakened with the Russia-Ukraine War, the fact that countries turned to Russian energy by taking into account their national interests weakened the influence of the USA. The Washington government, on the other hand, tries to maintain its power through both bilateral relations and structures such as the G20. Blinken's visit can be read as the US still attaches importance to diplomatic methods. However, Washington also gives the message that it can turn to different tools if necessary. Because while visiting Blinken, India; the USA's efforts to strengthen its relations with Pakistan in terms of security and economy contain a message for New Delhi.

[1] "US State Secy Antony Blinken to Visit Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, India from Feb 28-Mar 3", The Economic Times, <https://economic-times.indiatimes.com/news/india/us-state-secy-antony-blinken-to-visit-kazakhstan-uzbekistan-india-from-feb-28-mar-3/article-show/98196063.cms>, (Date of Accession: 20.02.2023).



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Korean Peninsula: Pandora's Box in Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific Region is a region where competitions and cyclical influence struggles in global geopolitics are manifested. As a matter of fact, it can be said that fault lines in international security pass through this region. What Asia-Pacific means to the global system, the Korean Peninsula means the same to Asia-Pacific. Because it is possible to read the security equation of the Pacific from the security perspective of the Korean Peninsula.

In this context, it is known that exercises are held against North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear tests in partnership with the United States (USA), South Korea and Japan. However, since South Korea is one of the states that feel the danger most closely, Seoul wants to speed up and intensify these exercises. At the same time,

South Korea aims to conduct bilateral and more specific exercises with the United States. In short, the Seoul administration is trying to channel Washington's attention to the Pyongyang threat. As a matter of fact, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's visit to Seoul in February 2023 before the bilateral exercises planned to be held in partnership with the USA and South Korea, and during this visit, deterrence steps to be taken against North Korea were discussed,[1] which is an important development for South Korea to get what it wants.

First of all, it can be said that the current situation brings South Korea closer to the West, the USA and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) line with each passing day. Because North Korea, due to its official state ideology,



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"Juche" policy, aims not to be dependent on foreign sources, both politically and economically, at home and abroad. In particular, Pyongyang's increase in nuclear power is important in this regard. South Korea, on the other hand, does not have such a policy. This causes Seoul to need Western and US support geopolitically, geostrategically and geoeconomically. In this case, it is effective that South Korea's both defense and attack capacities are not at the level of the US and NATO forces. However, both the Western-based alliances and exercises with regional actors and the relations developed with Western actors do not play a role in reducing the danger on a regional scale; it can be argued that it provoked Pyongyang even more and increased the danger of using nuclear power. This makes the regional security environment fragile.

On the other hand, the West continues its actions in the region and increases the pressure on North Korea. This situation pushes the Korean Peninsula, which can be described as "Pandora's Box" in the Asia-Pacific context, to the brink of a nuclear danger. In particular, Japan, which is increasingly pro-Western and proactive, and at the same time constitutes an important pillar of the cooperation established with the USA, South Korea and Japan in the Asia-Pacific Region, is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The fact that it is a non-permanent member and will host the G7 Summit in 2023 is an indication that the West will increase the pressure it puts on Pyongyang through the United Nations (UN). As a matter of fact, the UNSC targeted North Korea for the first time this year at the meeting chaired by Japan on January 30, 2023.[2] This confirms the argument in question.

In addition to all these, it can be said that both the West and North Korea did not step back and forced the Pandora's box to open by making the security fault lines fragile through the "cowardly chicken game" they played. Because North Korea made its largest and most comprehensive ballistic missile display ever on February 9, 2023.[3]

In addition to all these, Pyongyang tested its second largest intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), named Hwasong-15, on February 19, 2023. According to KCNA, the North Korean State Media, this attempt was made to send a message to the United States and South Korea.[4] As a matter of fact, the ICBM named Hwasong-15 has a range of 13 thousand kilometers.[5] This range also covers an area that can hit Washington.

Moreover, after the test in question, Pyongyang also fired two short-range missiles to the east of the Pacific on the same date. It was stated that this was done as a reaction to the US-South Korea bilateral dialogue in the region. At the same time, KCNA

stated that these trials are the result of increased dialogue on the Washington-Seoul line.[6] Moreover, Kim Yo Jong, the sister of North Korean President Kim Jong-un, also said that Seoul should end its cooperation with Washington so that South Korea does not become a "shooting range" for them.[7] Therefore, the process reveals the provocative effect of the Western alliance and South Korea's pursuit of de-nuclearization on Pyongyang.

In this context, the West continues to escalate the tension and does not leave the said attempts of North Korea unanswered. After the aforementioned trials, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin came together on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on February 18, 2023 and exchanged views on the North Korean threat. As a matter of fact, the importance of the exercises developed under the leadership of the USA against this danger was emphasized.[8] Again at the same conference, a meeting was held between Park, Hayashi and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in which all three countries reaffirmed their cooperation towards denuclearization of North Korea.[9] The fact that North Korea is included in the meetings between these three states in such an important conference shows the consolidation of the West against North Korea.

At the same time, on February 19, 2023, the USA and South Korea held joint air exercises in the region and pointed to the trials of Pyongyang as the reason for these exercises.[10] In addition, the UNSC decided to meet urgently on 20 February 2023 due to the missile tests carried out by North Korea repeatedly.[11]

Tensions did not subside after the events, and in an interview, Park Jin described North Korea as an "existing and clear" threat. In this regard, he emphasized that the deterrence of the USA is the only hope of South Korea.[12] On February 23, 2023, a missile defense exercise was held in the Asia-Pacific Region with the cooperation of Seoul, Tokyo and Washington.[13] Following these exercises, North Korea tested four strategic cruise missiles during an exercise designed to demonstrate its ability to conduct a nuclear counterattack against enemy forces, according to KCNA.[14] This is important in terms of showing that the parties have not taken a step back and the extent of the tension has reached.

As a result, Asia-Pacific Region, in the world; The Korean Peninsula may also be called "Pandora's Box" in Asia-Pacific. Because the tension, which started to manifest through nuclear empowerment, has reached dimensions that are difficult to handle. Unless a common denominator is reached in the minimum commonalities, it is possible that a nuclear crisis that will occur over the Korean Peninsula will open the "Pandora's Box" and cause a regional and then global destruction.





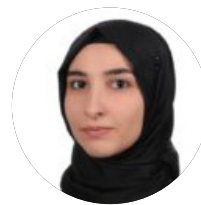
## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Assessment of the One-Year Process of the Russia-Ukraine War

The Russia-Ukraine War, which started on February 24, 2022, has been going on for a year. Russia has started a new historical process with the occupation, which it calls a "special military operation". During the process in question, many global ruptures occurred; the war had serious impact on the foreign policy orientations of the countries. The war, which has reflections on many issues such as global alliances, energy and regional alliances, has also brought frozen conflicts to the agenda again. At this point, it is witnessed that various disputes

and tensions in different regions from the Balkans to South Asia have flared up again.

As a matter of fact, the Ukraine intervention, which was carried out after Russia announced that there was no invasion plan despite the 100,000 soldiers heaped on the Ukrainian border, has completed its first year. At the beginning of the war, Moscow prepared a list containing various demands, especially for Ukraine not to be a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); however, these demands



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were rejected by the West. Later, the United States of America (USA) and Western countries tried to wear out Moscow with the sanction decision they took; but this does not only affect Russia. Sanctions also have an impact on the global supply chain.

The war took on a nature that turned into a Russia-NATO or Russia-West struggle over time. Russia's intervention also caused concern in other countries and caused actors to turn to collective security mechanisms. In this context, Sweden and Finland applied for NATO membership. With the application of the two countries, new debates arose within NATO as well. Also, in June 2022, it was decided in the European Parliament that Ukraine and Moldova should be candidate countries for membership.[1]

Another important issue is the aid that countries send to Ukraine. In particular, the supports for military ammunition shows that the aim is to end the war before it spreads to other areas. At the same time, aid is given to Kiev in order to break and weaken Moscow's power as much as possible. At this point, another situation that should be mentioned is that the countries of the world are divided into three. It is possible to classify the countries as those who are on the side of Ukraine in line with their attitudes, those who are close to Russia, and those who try to act wary.

The categorization in question also affects the relations of states with each other. For example, the attitudes of countries such as India, Pakistan and China have been criticized by the Western World. The increasing rapprochement between China and Russia and the possibility of Beijing taking a similar step on Taiwan by taking Moscow as an example, are among the new dynamics that emerged with the war.

With the effect of the aforementioned discussions, the interest of Western countries and especially the USA to Taiwan has increased. The Taiwan visit of the former Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, can be described as the peak of tension. In addition to this, the war also played a role in the rise of India in the international arena. As an actor with close ties to both the USA and Russia, it can be said that New Delhi has increased its influence in global politics. Therefore, it is seen that the war is also determinant in the global balances and the values of the countries.

On the other hand, it is seen that the war led the countries, especially the Western actors, to different views and the actors were divided into two regarding the duration of the war. While some states see the prolongation of the war in terms of weakening Russia, it is in their own interests; some countries want the war to end as soon as possible. Because the energy crisis that emerged with the war

affects many countries deeply. In particular, it is seen that France, Germany and Italy are not as harsh on Russia as England, Poland and the Baltic countries. As a matter of fact, this situation is also reflected in the foreign policy attitudes of the countries. For example, France welcomed the 12-point roadmap proposed by China on the war moderately, and French President Emmanuel Macron announced that he would visit Beijing in April 2023.[2]

It is also possible to talk about a Western World coexisting in the dimension of transatlantic relations. Because the common and overlapping statements of European leaders and USA officials indicate that there is a consensus on the war.[3] In fact, it was not expected that the conflict, which turned into a war of attrition on Russia, would last so long. However, it can be said that it is still not possible to talk about the negotiation or ceasefire process in the war which has entered its second year due to the military aid to Ukraine.

One of the effects of war is energy-based. Due to the crisis affecting the energy markets, many countries have started to seek new resource. In this sense, the international visibility of energy rich states has increased and countries in question have come to an advantageous position in using their power. In this context, it can be said that the interest towards Central Asian, Middle Eastern and North African countries has increased.

Also, the fact that Central Asian countries are located in the former Soviet geography has opened up the possibility that Russia may carry its expansionist attitude to these regions. Therefore, in addition to energy, the threat perception centered on Russia plays decisive role in the democratization, reform and approach of the countries of the region with Western countries. As a matter of fact, one of the effects of the war was the convergence in the relations between Central Asia-The Western World and the increase in the international prestige of the region.

One of the triggers of the war in the last year has been the re-emergence of frozen or dormant tensions. After Russia's annexation of four regions in the east of Ukraine, the possibility of taking action against the separatist Transnistria Region in Moldova started to be mentioned. This possibility in question still remains valid.

A second point is the tensions in the Balkans. In addition to the increasing concerns about Russia's influence in the Western Balkans, the deepening of regional disputes increases the possibility of new conflicts. The countries of the region see the Western Balkans as the "weak point of the European security system". As a matter of fact, the President of North Macedonia, Stevo Pendarovski has per-

sonally expressed this.[4] The search for membership in the European Union and NATO has also increased in this geography. On the other hand, the mobility of Serbian separatists has also increased. This situation negatively affects the stability of the region.

Another issue revealed by the Russian activity in the Donbas region is the relative failure of the Russian military power and the resistance of Ukraine. The second phase of the war developed on maintaining influence in the aforementioned region rather than advancing in Ukraine. Therefore, in this case, the relative success of Ukraine can be mentioned.

In addition, the casualties and loss of soldiers in the war are also important in terms of military capacity and competence. The British Ministry of Defense claims that Russian and special military forces have suffered between 40,000 and 60,000 deaths and possibly 175,000 to 200,000 casualties since the beginning of the invasion. On Ukraine, the Norwegian General Staff made an estimate and mentioned about 100,000 dead or wounded soldiers.[5]

War also has a human dimension. Because hundreds of people leaving Russia and Ukraine have led to a global mobility. While the Refugee Agency stated that the war caused the biggest refugee crisis in Europe in the 21st century,[6] the United Nations also announced that the number of people leaving Ukraine in April 2022 exceeded 5 million.[7] The current number is estimated to be over 8 million.[8] In addition to human mobility, the increase in food prices and the global food crisis are among the consequences of the war.

As a result, it is seen that the war affects critical processes in many areas at the global level. In addition to this, there is no indication that the war will end in the short term or that processes such as negotiations and ceasefire will be entered into. In one year the global order has completely changed and the unpredictability continues. The consequences of the war, such as causing new conflicts, changing the balances of alliances and triggering security dilemmas, have already emerged.

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## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# The Challenge Ahead for North Macedonia: Constitutional Amendments

The inclusion of Bulgarians in the Constitution of North Macedonia is a frequently mentioned issue, especially in terms of North Macedonia's tense relations with Bulgaria and the European Union (EU) membership process.

For North Macedonia, which has set EU membership as an important foreign policy goal for itself, there are obstacles arising from interstate problems that need to be resolved on the way to membership. As it is known, the Skopje administration resolved the dispute with Greece arising from the name "Macedonia" through the Prespa Agreement signed on 17 June 2018.[1] However, the problems between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, another state that has the possibility of vetoing the EU accession process continue.

The Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation signed between Bulgaria and North Macedonia in 2017 did not bring any concrete results either. Moreover, mutual accusations were made on the grounds that the obligations of the said treaty were not complied with.

However, Bulgaria demands that the recognition of the Bulgarian minority by North Macedonia be included in the constitution. In this context, France presented a proposal to the parties in 2022 that would allow Bulgaria to lift its veto. The proposal in question aimed to resolve the disagreement regarding the Bulgarian minority, which has become controversial both in the domestic policy of North Macedonia and in its relations with Bulgaria. However, upon the North Macedonian authorities'



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declaring this proposal unacceptable, the proposal was revised and resubmitted, taking into account some objections.[2]

Then, North Macedonia accepted this plan, and thus, the opening phase of accession negotiations with the EU was reached on 19 July 2022.[3] It can be said that this development brought along a difficult process for the Government of North Macedonia, which has taken another important step towards the EU. Thus, the Government of North Macedonia is exposed to both the reactions of ethnic Macedonians and conservative nationalist politicians and the pressures of Bulgaria to implement the decision.

There are a number of obstacles are seen to exist to the government's successful implementation of the relevant constitutional amendments. Article 131 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia states the conditions that must be met for constitutional amendments as follows:

"The decision to introduce amendments to the Constitution is taken by the parliament by a majority of two-thirds of the total number of representatives. The draft constitutional amendment is approved by the parliament by a majority vote of the total number of representatives, and then it is submitted for public discussion. The decision to amend the constitution is taken by the parliament with a two-thirds majority of the total number of representatives. The constitutional amendment is announced by the parliament." [4]

The Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia has a total of 120 members. According to the conditions of the relevant article on constitutional amendments, 80 deputies, corresponding to a two-thirds majority of the total number of parliament, must approve the amendment decision.

It is seen that there is a substantial opposition within the country to these amendments, which the government wants to realize, especially with the motivation of progressing towards EU membership. In this manner, it is seen that the conservative Macedonian nationalist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) opposes the inclusion of the Bulgarian minority in the Constitution. The situation in question creates difficulty in realizing the constitutional amendments adopted by the government. As a result of the parliamentary elections held in 2020, VMRO-DPMNE is the main opposition party in the parliament with 44 seats.[5] This means that the government will have to convince VMRO-DPMNE deputies under all circumstances in order to obtain the required number of votes for constitutional amendments.

In return, VMRO-DPMNE has maintained its opposition to the inclusion of Bulgarians in the constitution since the submission of the French proposal. Finally, in February 2023, the party rejected the government's call for negotiations within the scope of persuasion efforts for constitutional amendment.[6] It is remarkable that VMRO-DPMNE responded to this call by saying that it "does not have the authority to discuss anything that is not approved by the citizens".[7] As a matter of fact, in a survey conducted by the Skopje Institute of Political Studies, 72,8% of the participating ethnic Macedonians responded negatively to the French proposal.[8] But apart from this survey, there is also a segment that supports the constitutional amendments with the motivation of EU membership.

The situation in question shows that there are differences of opinion on the subject throughout the country. In addition to all these, it can be said that the prolonged process in the adoption of constitutional amendments in domestic policy has caused pressure from Bulgaria, where tensions in relations are rising.

As a result, the difficulties in front of the attempt to include Bulgarians in the constitution with the motivation of EU membership in North Macedonia could not be eliminated. Both in 2022 and in the first months of 2023, the reaction of the country's public opinion and the events in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia show that this problem will continue. In addition, it can be said that this situation creates a serious obstacle in terms of improving relations between Bulgaria and North Macedonia.

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## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Australia's Multifaceted Foreign Policy Seekings in the US-China Competition

In the unipolar world order formed in the post-Cold War era, the United States of America (USA) is positioned as the hegemonic power. China, on the other hand, became the second largest economy in the world, surpassing Japan in 2010, after the 2008 economic crisis, and after this development, it challenged the West and the US hegemony and turned to the search for multipolarity.

This situation is considered by many as "2. Cold War" which was led to the start of a new global competition. In this context, Washington tries to take advantage of its own political experience in the multidimensional global competition it conducts with Beijing, and tries to use the containment policy it successfully implemented against the Soviet Union against Beijing.



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As such, this containment policy also adds a regional perspective to the US-China rivalry. At this point, states such as South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Philippines and Australia are important actors for the USA because of the values they adopt.

In this context, Canberra is included in the AUKUS Pact formed by the partnership of the USA, the UK and Australia, in the Quadruple Security Dialogue (QUAD) implemented by the USA, India, Japan and Australia, and in the ANZUS Agreement established with the co-operation of Australia, New Zealand and the USA. Because of this, the Canberra administration draws attention as a critical actor for the West. Because, in all three Western-based formations established in the Asia-Pacific Region, Australia is the only actor that takes place with the USA and does not change in this sense.

It can be said that this situation makes Canberra a critical ally in Washington's eyes for the containment of Beijing. At the same time, this situation also shows that Australia is a state that has completely accepted the Western perspective. But this makes Australia a target for China.

On the other hand, the establishment of the Labor Party Government under the leadership of Antony Albanese after the elections in May 2022 in Australia caused a change in the foreign policy of Canberra. Because after the new government, Australia started to develop warmer relations with China. However, the country does not want to lose the support of the West. This pushes Canberra to follow a multi-faceted foreign policy. However, due to the tense security equation of the Asia-Pacific Region, the states need to choose sides and Australia's existing alliance relations and alliances make Canberra's situation difficult. For example, on February 2, 2023, Australian Asistant Minister for Trade and Australian Asistant Minister for Manufacturing Tim Ayres said that Canberra and Beijing held important talks at the ministerial level prioritizing national interests. In his statement, Ayres said, "We have agreed that we will follow a calm and consistent approach that defends the national interests."<sup>[1]</sup>

The above-mentioned words can be read as Canberra's approach to Beijing adopts an attitude that emphasizes dialogue. Considering that China is Australia's main trading partner, it can be argued that economic interests are the basis at this point. However, if the convergence on the Beijing-Canberra line continues, it is inevitable that this will disturb the US and its Western allies.

On February 7, 2023, Australia and New Zealand held a meeting to improve the dialogue with China. At the same time, it was emphasized in this meeting that China is an important trade partner of both countries.<sup>[2]</sup> Currently, Canberra and Wellington are in an alliance relationship through ANZUS. This situation is decisive in the pro-Western stance of these states. However, these countries also have important economic relations with China. In fact, these relations cause both countries to be in limbo. For example, Albanese is trying to develop good relations with China; but when it behaves like this, it cannot meet the expectations of the West.

On the other hand, on February 8, 2023, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia conducted joint air exercises in the Nevada Desert to simulate high-level combat operations against Chinese warplanes.<sup>[3]</sup> It is seen that the cooperation of these countries over the anti-Chinese attitude disturbs Beijing as well and directs it to a more proactive policy. In addition, the presence of countries with a Western perspective such as Japan and South Korea in the region also increases the pressure on China. All these points indicate that there may be a hot conflict in the region in the future.

At the same time, on February 22, 2023, Australia and the Philippines held a meeting on joint patrols in the South China Sea.<sup>[4]</sup> Because, considering that the South China Sea is one of the most problematic issues in the region and the foreign policy of the Philippines approaching the West, it is possible to read these talks within the framework of the containment of China.

In short, Australia is stuck together and will not abandon its West-centered orientation; but it can be said that it does not want to give up his economic ties with China. Because some problems between China and Australia are not only related to the Western factor. On the contrary, it stems from the national security understanding of the Canberra administration. The struggle for influence over the

South China Sea is a concrete example of this. For this reason, it can be stated that Australia wants to balance this dilemma and the dialogue it is trying to develop with China by adopting a harsh stance against Russia in the Ukraine War. Because the Canberra administration expanded the sanctions it imposed on Russia on February 24, 2023 and decided to send unmanned aerial vehicles to Ukraine.<sup>[5]</sup>

As a result, Australia, although allied with the United States and its allies, has focused on developing close dialogues with China with the Albanese Government. But it is also clear that the security equation of the Asia-Pacific Region and Canberra's alliance relations limit the rapprochement with Beijing. In this case, it can be said that the expectations of the West are effective. That's why the Albanese Government is trying to strike a balance by taking a tough stance against Russia.

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## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Russia-China Cooperation in the Context of the Republic of South Africa

On January 23, 2023, Naledi Pandor, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, stated that his country will host an exercise organized by China and Russia. At the same time, Pandor stated that this exercise will take place on February 17-27, 2023.[1] Given the current structure of the international system, this exercise is of great importance.

As is well known, Chinese President Xi Jinping is concerned about the prolongation of the Russia-Ukraine war.[2] This is because the war has consolidated the West. It is also argued that the damage caused to the global economy by the prolongation of the war also disturbs Xi. This is because China plays a crucial role in the global

supply chain. At the same time, Beijing also has extremely intricate economic relations with the West.

Moreover, the West wants China to use its influence and influence on Russia to persuade Moscow to let Beijing end the war. This is because of the close dialogue between Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin. It is precisely in this environment that Beijing and Moscow can be said to be sending a message of unity against the West through joint exercises. This is because it is clear that cooperation between Beijing and Moscow and acting together in line with common interests is a disadvantage for the West both regionally and globally.



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As a matter of fact, although China and Russia have some conflicts, it is seen that they follow a common policy in terms of opposition to the United States of America (USA) and NATO. Due to the exercises in question, it can be argued that China sees the presence of Moscow around the Indian Ocean as an advantageous situation against the West.

On the other hand, it is well known that Russia did not get what it wanted in the war in Ukraine and regressed.[3] In such a conjuncture, it can be said that Russia is trying to send a message to the West that things are going well in Ukraine by participating in exercises in a region far from its western borders. In addition, given the proximity of the offshore of the Republic of South Africa to the Asia-Pacific region, it can also be argued that Russia is trying to show that it will stand by China in the possible Taiwan Crisis. This is because, according to the West, there is a similarity between the Taiwan and Ukraine issues, and a victory in the Ukrainian War would provide motivation to Beijing through Taipei.[4] This would therefore require the West to take into account the Russian factor in any potential crisis over Taiwan.

On the other hand, due to this cooperation with China, it can be inferred that Russia wants to play a role in the possible power and influence struggles in the eastern borders, especially in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. In this sense, this exercise may increase Russia-China unity. This unity may continue in a strong way even after the war.

However, it is known that there has been serious criticism of the exercises from the West. It is obvious that such an alliance would harm the interests of the West. Pandor has already stated that the West is silent about some exercises while criticizing others and that this is a “double standard”.[5]

At this point, it can be stated that the Republic of South Africa welcomes these exercises. Indeed, the country may consider the exercises important for its national security. In fact, Russia and China may have given some security guarantees to the Republic of South Africa. Indeed, the fact that China has a military base in Djibouti proves these inferences.[6] Because Djibouti and the Republic of South Africa are geographically very close.

All in all, it can be said that the joint exercise to be organized by Russia and China has many goals and messages both regionally and globally. It can also be argued that Moscow may want to use this unity in the future to gain Beijing's support in the Ukraine War. However, it can also be predicted that China will not provide Russia with open support in the Ukraine War. Rather, Beijing stands side by side with Moscow in the context of the search for multipolarity in order to send a message to the West.

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## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Growing US Interest in Central Asia: Blinken's Visits to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

United States of America (USA) Foreign Minister Antony Blinken went to Astana on February 28, 2023 to attend the "C5+1" meeting, which is the main mechanism by which the Washington administration conducts its contacts with Central Asian capitals. Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan also attended.

The meeting in question is very important in terms of revealing the increasing importance of Central Asia in American foreign policy. Be-

cause, especially after the Russia-Ukraine War that started on February 24, 2022, the USA intensified its contacts with the Central Asian states. For the USA, the development of relations with Central Asia has three purposes. The first of these is related to the role that the states of the region can play in overcoming the energy crisis, the effects of which were felt at the global level after the Russia-Ukraine War. The USA wants Central Asian countries to take responsibility for meeting the energy needs of the West.



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The second goal is related to the desire to evaluate the power vacuum created in the region by Russia's focus on the war in Ukraine, and not being able to focus much on post-Soviet countries. In other words, Washington wants to be present in the region that the Moscow administration describes as the "near environment" within the framework of the Primakov Doctrine.

Thirdly, the USA is trying to develop its relations with the states of the region in terms of security in order to maintain its influence in Eurasia after its withdrawal from Afghanistan. In this sense, the issue of combating terrorism and radicalization comes to the fore.

On the other hand, it can be argued that Central Asian countries also want to gain some gains through relations with the USA. In this sense, it can be said that the states of the region have three basic expectations. First of all, the regional states carry out democratization reforms aimed at strengthening the state-nation unity. These reforms, on the other hand, mainly contain the tendency of liberalization and therefore Westernization. The regional capitals should ensure that their political stance serves economic development in a way that strengthens the state-nation unity; that is, the reforms aim to increase the welfare of the people. For this reason, it can be stated that states with a tendency towards Westernization expect investment from the USA, the leading actor of the Western World. In fact, the basis of the C5+1 format is the development of commercial relations.

Secondly, the states of the region, since they are post-Soviet countries, have started to be more sensitive about their national security, sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence after Russia's intervention in Ukraine. Therefore, these countries have begun to see the USA as an important partner in their balance policies as part of their multi-vector foreign policy. This is in Washington's interests.

The third expectation is cooperation in the fight against extremism and separatism against the increasing terrorist threats in the region within the framework of the Afghan Problem. Undoubtedly, this situation coincides with the expectations of the USA.

Within the framework of all this information, when we look at the messages given by Blinken during the C5+1 Meeting, it is seen that the US Secretary of State focused on the Russia-Ukraine War. In this sense, Blinken declared that all five Central Asian states would support their independence.[1] For this reason, the summit can be interpreted as a concrete step taken by the Washington administration to move Central Asian capitals away from Moscow.

In addition, Blinken met with his Kazakh counterpart Mukhtar Tileuberdi during his visit to Kazakhstan. At the joint press conference held by the two ministers after the meeting, Tileuberdi said:[2]

"The bilateral trade volume between Kazakhstan and the USA exceeded 3 billion dollars in 2022 and this figure is 37.2 percent higher than the results of the previous year. Exports are increasing; because the USA has been one of the biggest investors in Kazakhstan's economy since 1993. Total foreign direct investment inflows from the USA to Kazakhstan exceeded \$62 billion... With the participation of the American capital function, about 590 enterprises are located in Kazakhstan, showing that more US companies are interested in the Kazakh market."

The statements of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan can be interpreted as investment in Astana's main expectation regarding relations with Washington. Blinken, on the other hand, used the following statements at the same press conference:[3]

"We appreciate Kazakhstan for continuing to host more than 200,000 Russian citizens who fled their country after Putin started the war. I would also like to thank the people of Kazakhstan for generously providing Ukraine with food, clothing, medicine and other humanitarian supplies, and for establishing invincibility dorms in Kiev and Bucha."

Blinken's statements, on the other hand, indicate that the priority of the USA is to distance Kazakhstan from Russia and to persuade Ukraine to support it more. On the other hand, Blinken also met with the President of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kasım-Cömert Tokayev. In this meeting, Blinken emphasized the support given by the USA to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Central Asian countries; Mr. Tokayev also thanked the open support of the USA in the aforementioned issues.[4]

As it can be understood, the Washington administration is trying to turn its distance from Russia into an opportunity due to the distrust they feel about the sovereignty and independence of the post-Soviet countries after the Russia-Ukraine War. Kazakhstan is at the forefront of this insecurity. Because there is a serious Russian population in the north of Kazakhstan. This situation causes concern in Astana. Because, as in Ukraine, Russia may choose to use the Russian population as a reason for intervention.

On the other hand, as it is known, Kazakhstan has focused on reform processes especially after Mr. Tokayev became President. Therefore, it can be said that liberalization processes were dis-



cussed in the negotiations between the parties. In this context, it can be predicted that the USA will continue to support the reform processes in Kazakhstan and increase its investments in Kazakhstan. In addition, it can be stated that the search for energy-based cooperation between the parties, especially the Caspian, will intensify.

The second Central Asian country that Blinken visited before going to New Delhi to attend the G20 Summit was Uzbekistan. Because, just like Astana, Tashkent carries out reform processes with the aim of westernization. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that Blinken's visit calendar includes two countries that stand out in terms of reforms. As a matter of fact, the first statement of the US Secretary of State, who went to Tashkent on March 1, 2023, was that he was looking forward to discussing bilateral relations and Uzbekistan's reform plans.[5] Moreover, it is known that Blinken consulted with his Uzbek counterpart, Bakhtiyor Saidov, on this issue during the C5+1 Meeting in Astana. As a matter of fact, Saidov made the following statements regarding Blinken's visit:[6]

"We appreciate the US administration's interest and support for President Mirziyoyev's reform agenda aimed at deepening good and friendly relations with our neighbors, as well as ensuring good governance, the rule of law, and human rights."

As can be understood, Uzbekistan attaches importance to the support of the Washington administration regarding the reform processes. The USA is also aware that the reform processes carried out in Uzbekistan are at one point an effort to westernize. Of course, this situation is due to the decrease in the influence of Russia in Central Asia and the West in general; In particular, it means increasing the influence of the USA. This indicates a situation in line with the messages given by Blinken on the occasion of the C5+1 Meeting. As a reflection of this, the interest of the USA in Uzbekistan is increasing. The most important expectation of the Tashkent administration is to attract investment to the country within the framework of the 2030 Development Strategy. For this reason, it can be argued that the investments of US companies towards the country will increase.

On the other hand, it can be said that the fate of the helicopters and planes that came to Uzbekistan with the soldiers of the deposed regime, which were given to the ousted regime of Afghanistan by the USA and fled after the Taliban entered Kabul, were discussed during the negotiations between the parties. Currently, the transfer of these military vehicles to Uzbekistan by the USA is on the agenda. Therefore, it is possible to claim that

this issue has also been discussed, although it is not clearly reflected in the press. This, in turn, may open the door to the development of security-based cooperation in US-Uzbekistan relations. At the same time, the process may create an environment in which US-Uzbekistan relations will deepen in the context of the Afghan Problem.

As a result, Blinken is trying to take advantage of the C5+1 mechanism to break Russia's influence in Central Asia. While doing this, it attaches special importance to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which have taken important steps towards Westernization. In this context, the expectation of the USA; while being shaped by energy, geopolitical and security factors, regional capitals, especially Astana and Tashkent; It has expectations such as attracting foreign direct investment, supporting the reform processes, developing cooperation in the field of security in the context of the Afghan Problem and supporting their territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence by the USA.

[1] "Blinken Warns Central Asia of Dangers from War in Ukraine", AP News, <https://apnews.com/article/politics-kazakhstan-government-kassym-jomart-tokayev-antony-blinken-uzbekistan-53c2b369350d2870aae2356ade4434f1>, (Date of Accession: 01.03.2023).

[2] "Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Kazakhstan Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tileuberdi At a Joint Press Availability", U. S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-kazakhstan-foreign-minister-mukhtar-tileuberdi-at-a-joint-press-availability/>, (Date of Accession: 01.03.2023).

[3] Ibid.

[4] "Blinken in Kazakhstan for Central Asia Talks Amid Ukraine War", Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/asia-pacific/blinden-in-kazakhstan-for-central-asia-talks-amid-ukraine-war>, (Date of Accession: 01.03.2023).

[5] "Blinken to Discuss Reforms in Uzbekistan Visit", Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/blinden-to-discuss-reforms-in-uzbekistan-visit/6984637.html>, (Date of Accession: 01.03.2023).

[6] Ibid.



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Border Tension on the Belarus-Poland Line

Recently, the Belarusian-Polish border has attracted attention as one of the tensest border lines in the world. Especially since 2021, the relations between the two countries have been shaped by crises. The dispute between Minsk and Warsaw has been particularly influenced by the movement of irregular migration towards Europe. Because Belarus has recent-

ly become an important route in the flow of migration to Europe. The main goal of Poland, which is one of the countries with the toughest stance against migration among the European Union (EU) member states, is to minimize the flow of migrants from Belarus to the country.



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In addition to all this, Poland is the center of anti-Russian sentiment in Eastern European geopolitics, while Belarus stands out as Russia's most important ally in this region. Therefore, this situation reveals how decisive the Russian factor is at the root of the problem between the parties. Currently, the Moscow administration aims to intervene in the demographic structure of Europe through Belarus. In this context, the Kremlin wants to increase its influence in the region through Minsk.

On the other hand, it is known that the border problem on the Minsk-Warsaw line surfaced long before the start of the Russia-Ukraine War. As a matter of fact, the isolation of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko by the West since 2020 has opened the door for Minsk to use the migration card against the EU. Thus, Lukashenko has tried to extract some concessions from the EU on the occasion of irregular migration.

In this context, 2021 has been a year in which relations between Belarus and Poland have been extremely tense. Another issue that has led to tension between the two countries, however, is related to Warsaw's suggestion that Minsk has a discriminatory attitude towards the Polish minority in the country. In Belarus, which has a population of 9.5 million, Poles constitute about 3% of the population. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, half of the west of Belarus belonged to Poland.[1] According to 2019 data, Belarus claims that there are about 300,000 ethnic Poles living in the country, while the Warsaw administration claims that the real number can be increased to 1.1 million.[2] Therefore, the problem of the Polish minority living in Belarus plays a decisive role in shaping the relations between the two countries at least as much as the migration issue. However, it can be said that the minority issue is ignored due to the migration problem between the parties.

On the other hand, in November 2021, thousands of migrants from various parts of the world wanted to cross the Belarus-Poland border to Poland, which brought the tension between the parties to a peak. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki described the crisis as the biggest attempt to destabilize Europe since the Cold War, while the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) suggested that Belarus was using migrants as a hybrid tactic.[3] Another point worth noting is that on November 4, 2021, Belarus and Russia approved a new military doctrine within the framework of the "Programme of the State of the Union", including the concept of a common migration policy.[4]

On the occasion of this crisis, the Minsk administration wanted to use the migration factor as a bargaining factor against Brussels. However, Belarus' move backfired and its relations with the West became tenser.

Poland's response to Belarus' move has been to increase border security. In this context, the Warsaw administration decided to build a wall worth 394 million euros on the border in order to stop the flow of migrants from Belarus in January 2022 and this wall was completed on June 30, 2022. The 5.5-meter-high steel wall, covered with barbed wire, has a length of 186 kilometres.[5]

In addition to all this, the Russia-Ukraine War resulted in a further increase in the tension between the parties. Because in the war in Ukraine, Warsaw has come to the fore as one of Kyiv's biggest supporters, while the isolation of Minsk has increased even more.

Finally, on February 9, 2023, the border tension between the two countries reached a new dimension. In this context, the Warsaw administration decided to close the Belarus-Poland border gate in Bobrowniki following the arrest of Andrzej Poczobut, a journalist and activist of Polish origin in Belarus.

Polish Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski described Poczobut's imprisonment as the culmination of the Belarusian government's repression of the Polish minority in the country, which has been going on since the beginning of 2021.[6]

As can be understood, this shows how important the minority problem is between the two countries. The arrest of the Polish activist by Belarus is one of the factors that led Warsaw to close the border gate. In this context, it can be foreseen that the situation of the Polish minority in Belarus will continue to create problems between the parties.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the Belarus-Poland border will remain one of the most problematic borders in Europe for a longer period of time. However, it can be said that the minority issue between the two countries will continue to play a role in shaping relations.

[1] Maria Wilczek, "Lukashenko Plays the Poland Card and Ratchets Up Tensions With Warsaw", Politico, <https://www.politico.eu/article/alexander-lukashenko-belarus-poland-activists-arrests-tension/>, (Date of Accession: 13.02.2023).

[2] "Poland to Close Border Checkpoint With Belarus", Politico, <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-close-border-checkpoint-belarus-bobrowniki/>, (Date of Accession: 13.02.2023).

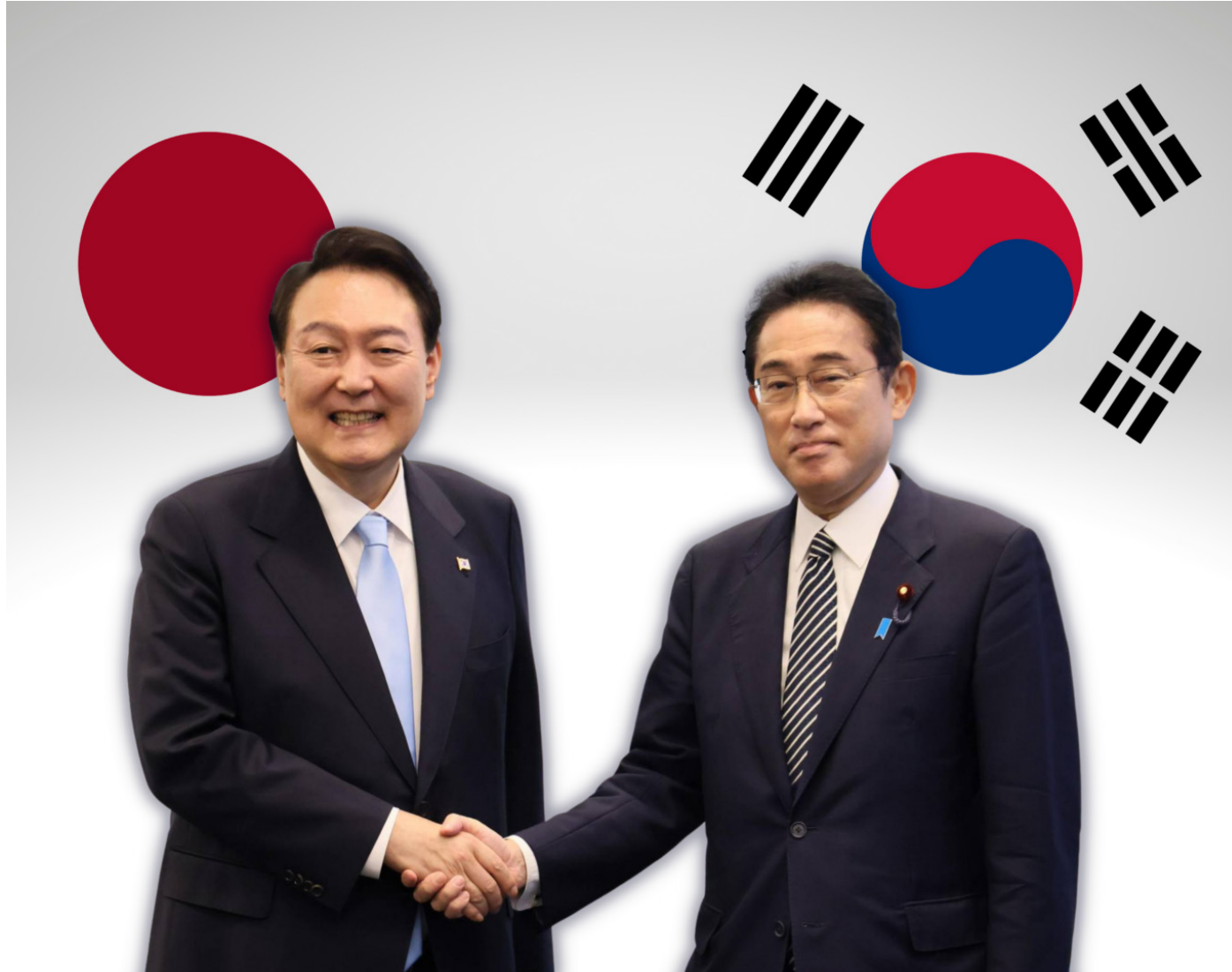
[3] "Poland Says Border Crisis 'Greatest' Bid to Destabilize Europe Since Cold War", VOA, <https://www.voanews.com/a/poland-says-border-crisis-greatest-bid-to-destabilize-europe-since-cold-war/6321788.html>, (Date of Accession: 13.02.2023).

[4] "Putin, Lukashenko Approve Military Doctrine of Union State", AA, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/putin-lukashenko-approve-military-doctrine-of-union-state/2412346>, (Date of Accession: 13.02.2023).

[5] "Poland Completes Belarus Border Wall to Keep Migrants Out", Associated Press, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-afrika-poland-forests-middle-east-443c8068ea7b5d1d8f6980da6e3879af>, (Date of Accession: 13.02.2023).

[6] "Poland Closes Main Belarus Border Crossing and Prepares Further Sanctions for Regime Figures", Notes From Poland, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2023/02/09/poland-closes-main-belarus-border-crossing-and-prepares-further-sanctions-for-regime-figures/>, (Date of Accession: 13.02.2023).





## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Japan as a “Close Neighbor” in the South Korean Defense Report

Asia-Pacific is becoming a region where international competition and power struggles occur as days pass. In this regard, it can be argued that the mentioned region is the central area of global influence conflicts. This is because it can be said that the rivalries in the Asia-Pacific are basically manifested through the poles built, the alliances involved, and the

exercises carried out. As a matter of fact, this situation makes the actions and discourses of the countries in the region significant.

One of the most essential reasons why the region has such a framework is that China is located in this region. Because China is a global power and aims to compete with the United



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States of America (USA) in the “rules-based international order”. The global power struggle between China and the USA, which is against Western hegemony based on its search for multipolarity, further increases the importance of the region. Another important reason is that Japan, the world’s third-largest economy, is located in this region. Because Japan is a significant actor both in terms of its history and current situation. Moreover, the other issue that increases the importance of the region, it can be mentioned that North Korea, which is a great nuclear power, is located in this region.

When the basic cyclical framework of the region is drawn, it can be said that under the leadership of the USA and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), states such as Australia, the Philippines, South Korea, New Zealand, Japan, and Vietnam draw attention. Against this pole, it is seen that there are states that share a similar perspective against Western hegemony, such as China and North Korea. This is because polar politics constitutes the political ground of the region.

Especially considering that global security equations are based on this region, the “security” and “defense” themed documents and reports of the states in the region are significant. This is why the definitions and action plans in the aforementioned documents are critical for the security framework of the Asia-Pacific. At this point, it is important to examine the definitions of “close neighbor”[1] for Japan and “enemy”[2] for North Korea in the South Korea Defense Report[3] published by the Ministry of National Defense of South Korea on February 16, 2023.

As a matter of fact, it is noteworthy that South Korea names Japan as its “close neighbor” in the document and that Tokyo is an actor that Seoul should establish a cooperative relationship for the future. This is because, in the document published in 2020, Japan was named only as a “neighboring country”. In addition to all these, it was stated in the previous document in 2022 that both countries have common values and that the Ministry of National Defense of South Korea should develop close relations with Japan.[4]

In this context, it is worth mentioning that South Korea and Japan are the states that most closely feel the nuclear danger posed by North Korea due to both their ideological perspectives and their geographical locations. At the same time, due to the fact that they have a Western perspective, these states are currently in close proximity to their foreign policy production processes.

However, the USA and NATO are trying to consolidate these countries both within the scope of China’s containment policy and in opposition to North Korea. At the present time, joint exercises are held in the region with the cooperation of the USA, South Korea, and Japan.

All these matters increase the rapprochement between South Korea and Japan. Yet, the close relations shaped in the context of a common threat were ultimately reflected in practice as the USA and NATO gained influence in the region. Although there is still a conflict over the Dokdo and Takeshima Islands, the definition of Tokyo as a close neighbor in the defense document published by Seoul indicates that the parties will continue their relations through alliances. Because of in his speech on March 1, 2023, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol defined Japan as “an ally that shares the same international values with South Korea”. He also stated that Seoul and Tokyo should cooperate in the face of the economy, security, and global problems.[5]

In a nutshell, both the Western perspective and the common threat perception are the factors that bring South Korea and Japan closer to each other. As a matter of fact, as long as the threat perceptions regarding China and North Korea continue at the regional and global level, it can be forecasted that the cooperation between South Korea and Japan will remain.

[1] “Korean Defense Paper Describes Japan as Close Neighbor”, The Japan News, <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/world/asia-pacific/20230216-91466/>, (Date of Accession: 03.03.2023).

[2] “South Korea Defense Report Revives ‘Enemy’ Label For North”, AP News, <https://apnews.com/article/politics-south-korea-government-north-united-states-aca638944fed301cb4ccbfc6d-cd84113>, (Date of Accession: 03.03.2023).

[3] “‘Surprise Attacks at Any Time’: South Korean Defense Report Outlines North’s Ongoing Threats”, Stars and Stripes, [https://www.strips.com/theaters/asia\\_pacific/2023-02-17/south-korea-defense-white-paper-9171082.html](https://www.strips.com/theaters/asia_pacific/2023-02-17/south-korea-defense-white-paper-9171082.html), (Date of Accession: 03.03.2023).

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[5] “South Korea’s Yoon Renews Hopes For Improved Ties with Japan”, AP News, <https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-yoon-japan-history-disputes-a5cd13cda03323ed8b0f0ff0850cc000>, (Date of Accession: 03.03.2023).

# ANKASAM IN PRESS

## 6 March 2023

Ankara Center for Crisis and Policy Studies (ANKASAM) President Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin Erol spoke to Al Jazeera in Arabic about the disaster diplomacy that came to the fore in Turkey-Greece relations after the Kahramanmaraş-centered earthquakes.

## 9 March 2023

ANKASAM President Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin Erol evaluated the current developments in foreign policy in TRT Ankara Radio Agenda program.

## 11 March 2023

Ankara Center for Crisis and Policy Studies (ANKASAM) President Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin Erol's evaluations on the increasing importance of the Middle Corridor were published in Habertürk.

## 11 March 2023

Ankara Center for Crisis and Policy Studies (ANKASAM) Chief Advisor of the President, Retired Ambassador Aydın Nurhan's evaluations on the NATO membership process of Sweden and Finland were broadcast on TRT Arabi.



*The latest issue of the International Journal of Crisis and Politics Studies, an international peer-reviewed journal operating within the Ankara Center for Crisis and Politics Studies (ANKASAM), has been published. Academic Keys, ASOS Index, CEEOL, Cite Factor, DRJI, Index Copernicus, Ideal Online, Research Bible, Sindex and TUBITAK DERGIPARK databases are scanned by our journal can be accessed via the link below.*

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